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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY USSR (Komi ASSR) REPORT [REDACTED]

SUBJECT 1. Vorkuta Coal Mines
2. Conditions in the Vorkuta Forced Labor Camps

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SOURCE EVALUATIONS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.

1. [REDACTED] report [REDACTED] containing information on the Vorkuta coal mines and conditions in the Vorkuta forced labor camps.
2. The report discusses in considerable detail the following topics:
- Importance of the Vorkuta coal deposits.
 - Transportation and industrial facilities in the area.
 - Production statistics.
 - Administration.
 - Geological conditions and other obstacles to be overcome in sinking the mine shafts.
 - Types of mining machinery used.
 - Established norms.
 - Treatment of prisoners, including clothing and food allowances, medical treatment wages, entertainment, and communication with the outside world.
 - Categories of workers.
 - Vorkuta strikes in 1953.
 - "Comrade Courts," created in December 1954.

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(Note: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "#".)

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1.

H.H. Bennett

October 1951 - March 1955

Vorkuta has the youngest and northernmost coal deposits in the Soviet Union.

Development of the area was a result of the loss of Donets Basin coal production during German occupation and inadequacy of Moscow Basin production. In 1954 Vorkuta produced 10% of ^{total} Soviet coal production.

Only 15% of the Vorkuta deposits have been opened for exploitation.

Vorkuta is connected with the internal transportation network by the 1700 km

long Bichora Line. No other ~~trans-~~

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portation facility connects Vorbata with the north. The tundra is barely passable because of bogs. 10000 of prisoners died during construction of the Pechora line from Inta to Vorbata. Inta is ^{at} the northern edge of the forest region. Vorbata coal deposits begin about 50 km north of ^{the city of} Vorbata & ~~extend~~ end north of Inta. Branch railroad lines have been built or are planned to reach the eastern & western extensions of the deposits.

A line was built from Vorbata to Yum-Yaga (N66-28, E61-59) 40 km east of Vorbata, where a number of shafts will be opened

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Those being constructed ~~in~~ have
started production or should be in full
production ~~by~~ⁱⁿ 1956. Some of the
other shafts, No. 8 for example

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one of the oldest Volbenta shafts,
will be exhausted by May 1956.

The 12th shaft produces 1,250,000

tons annually, & is the only capital
shaft in Volbenta area. The Soviets
define a capital shaft as one pro-
ducing more than 1 million tons a year.

#12, smallest in the area, produces

140,000 T annually. Average shaft

production is 300-500,000 T. 1953

production was said to amount to

10,150,000 T. Because of the strikes

in ~~the~~ July & August, & ~~gradual~~ ^{slow}

resumption of production, the

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1953 production ~~figure~~ suffered.

The Vorobta area is administered by the Vorobta Coal Combine, which was under the MVD until January 1954, and was headed by an MVD colonel.

The Ministry of the Coal Industry

gave mining advice until January 1954, when it ~~became responsible~~ took over the

Vorobta Coal Combine. MVD ~~officials~~

~~until 1952, coal was mined by army~~ men replaced by civil officials.

shafts with ~~low~~ production, & those

in outlying districts, are combined under one ~~into~~ shaft administration. Shaft

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Administrative II includes shafts 12, 14, and 16, with a total ^{annual} production of 880,000 ^m ~~7~~ 1404 $\frac{1}{2}$ \$. The large, central shafts are (directly subordinated) to the ^{coal} combine. The combine also controls a cement plant, ² brickyards, a large cold storage building, and 2 power stations. Industrial installations in Volbata are served by branch railroad lines.

On the ~~the~~ ~~shaft~~ ~~shaft~~ during the war, the shaft ~~was~~ built down to the first seam and mining & driving of the galleries began simultaneously.

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~~Due~~ the driving of galleries often ran
into ~~the~~ geological difficulties ^{and} pro-
duction suffered, since the mining
brigades moved ahead too fast to permit
the gallery brigades to prepare the
galleries adequately. In the new
shafts, the shaft & main galleries
were completed before mining began.
Since ~~the~~ stone in the Volunta area
is soft & crumbly, galleries often
collapse; our main galleries ~~are~~ ^{were} supported
~~by~~ with wood, and only the shaft
itself is made of bricks & cement.
Mining is further hampered by floods.

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In Shaft Administration II area, also called the northern region, ~~the~~ ~~50 percent~~ main seams lie under the Ural River, and 50 percent of the seams are wet. Volnuta shafts ~~contain~~ contain a lot of gas, and shafts Nos. 12 and 14 have a gas concentration of 3.5 to 4.5 percent, more gas than any other shafts in the USSR. ~~although~~ ~~the~~ ^{specify} Soviet safety regulations ~~that~~ that dynamite is not to be used in the presence of a gas concentration of 2.5 percent, dynamite is used anyway.

Mining in the Volnuta area was

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primitive for ~~a~~ a long time because of transportation difficulties & general lack of mechanical equipment in the USSR. In 1951 only the 1st & 5th shafts used fully mechanical methods. In flat seams, such as those in the north region, 4 men mined the coal while 15 ~~men~~ ^{carried} the coal ^{150 meters} to the ~~mining~~ wagons. Now-a-days even the smallest shafts have shoving chutes and conveyor belts. While dynamite was used extensively in 1951, almost 30 percent of the mining is now done with the ^{Dombas} machine. In

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shafts not using this machine,
two types of ~~two~~ KEMPE coal augers were
used. ~~The~~ Kempe machine is
extremely rugged and efficient. Type
I cuts ~~one~~ meter of coal at a time, and
Type II cuts 1.65 meters at a time.
Supports are ~~mostly~~ mostly wood-
steel props ~~are~~ occasionally ~~are~~
used in the 1st & 5th pits. Wood
comes primarily from Khor Oblast and the
Mordov ASSR. Delay in delivery of
wood often occurs because of trans-
port & weather ~~problems~~ difficulties.
The ~~one~~ ^{single} track is inadequate to

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supply sufficient wood. In the
~~the~~ 1953-1954 winter of /, production
often halted for days for lack of wood.
In the pits, wagons of with a capacity
of one ton were used. Until 1950,
the wagons were pulled by hand;
after 1950 electric tractors were
used. Horses were not used for pulling
the wagons.

East of the Vorobytz area, coal is said
to lie in six seams, reaching a maxi-
mum depth of 1200 meters. All
pits are working on the second or
third seams, with the maximum depth

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reached is 400 meters. Pits on the
edge of the field have ^{narrow} seams. ~~of matter~~

~~There are 12 pits~~ seams of the 12th

14th & 16th ~~pits~~ mines were only

80 cm to 1.2 meters wide, ~~whereas~~ ^{whereas}

the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th & 6th pits have

seams 3-4.5⁴ meters wide. The

12th & 14th pits are mining the

third seam, which has a width of

only 35 to 40 centimeters. This coal

is said to be of special quality and
~~is particularly valuable~~

it is shipped apart from the other

coal. The ^{third} seam floods often,

& the workers are always in danger.

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Working norms vary according to the size of the seam, geological conditions, and mining methods. In combined

dynamic & caving ~~methods~~ methods, ^{in the} 12th pit,

The norm for production from a seam

80 cm in width, ~~and the~~ is 6.2 T

per man. In a brigade of 25 men,

there are 3 mechanics, 4 carpenters,

a brigade leader, and an electrician.

The norm of 15.5 T. to be produced

by the brigade actually was produced

by 16 men. ~~In a seam~~ ^{at the same} 35 to 40

cm ~~high~~ ^{high}, the norm per man

in an eight-hour shift was 1.5 T.

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The brigade consisted of ~~11 men~~ ^{11 men, including}
3 mechanics, 2 carpenters, ~~the~~ brigade
leader, and an electrician. Actual
~~production for the~~ production by the
4 men ~~being engaged in~~ ~~work~~ was
therefore 4.1 T, not 1.5. It was
impossible to achieve the norm
in this mine. The brigade contin-
ually achieved 50% of the norm,
& received punishment rations. In
work with the combine, the norm
was 16 T. Norms were ~~checked~~ ^{checked}
every 3 months by the mine
administration, & if changes in

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conditions had occurred, the section leader could request a change in the norm. Norms have tended to increase over the last few years. In 1951 the brigade in the 12th shaft had a norm of 5.4T, + in 1955 9.6T. Since norms usually were fulfilled, because of reduction of sentence for overfulfilment, & pay, ~~production~~ increased.

For 110% overfulfilment of norm, 2 days were deducted from a sentence, for 120+% - 3 days deducted.

In cases of continual overfulfilment,

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when the sentence is reduced already
to $\frac{2}{3}$, the local MVD can direct
release of a prisoner. As most
~~const~~ native prisoners are sentenced to
10-15 years katorga, they double
their efforts to reduce sentence,
without realizing the effect on their
health of this murderous tempo.
Payment of prisoners was ^{also} introduced
in regime camps in March 1952,
after it had started in other camps
at the end of the war. Prisoners
received 40% of the wage paid
free workers for the same work.

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With 100% norm fulfillment, a miner in the 12th pit receives 360 rubles ~~for~~^{per shift}, with 9.6t tons, at 26 working days. Thus he receives 1.4 rubles per ton. Free workers receive 900 rubles for the same work, plus a place differential of 50%, making a monthly salary of 1,350 rubles. The other 60% of the prisoner's wages goes to the state. 3 years before release, 10% is deposited in a special release fund, which is paid the prisoner when he is released. For the 60% of his

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wages which is withheld, the prisoner receives from the MVD administration.

Clothing —

- 1 quilted jacket, 1 pair quilted trousers every 2 years
- 1 cloth jacket, 1 pair cloth trousers every year
- 1 pair composition shoes every 2 years
- 1 pair underwear every 6 months
- 2 pairs foot rag & 2 handkerchiefs per year
- 1 quilted wrap, one blanket, 1 mattress every 4 years.

Housing in a barrack 14 x 6 meters, with 80-100 men per barrack.

Food consisting daily of —

500 g bread, 60 g fish, 30 g meat, 150 g of millet, oats, or barley broth, 1500 g of cabbage soup, 11 g of fats & 30 g sugar.

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Treatment in case of illness.

Since camps had to support themselves, with nothing from the MVD, the withholding from previous salaries also paid salaries + allowances of the inflated MVD force. Pay of free mines seems high at first glance, but one must consider prices in the ~~priced zone~~ ~~priced zone~~, above all for fresh vegetables + fruits, which are paid out of proportion -

1 kg butter	3.2 R
1 kg rye bread	1.5 R
1 kg sausage (second quality)	2.8 R
1 kg apples	8 R
1 kg oil	1.8 R

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1 kg gran. sugar	12 R
1 m. gloves	350 R
1 sport shirt	90
1 suit, medium quality	800-1000 R

Just Mines don't receive free coal. Bought in small quantities, coal costs 82 R per ton. Because of the polar climate, this is a real strain.

Free workers pay 140-160 R monthly for a 1/2 room dwelling, without bath.

The common miner therefore is not in a very good position. Higher jobs receive more — chief of the dynamite crew receives 80 rubles per shift x 26 shifts = 2,080

R monthly + 50% polar differential =

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Sanitation & Accident Prevention

1. Underground mines for heavy work
2. " " " " " light "

The categorizing commission meets
three annually - June & December.

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The commission is made up of imprisoned doctors, under direction of a military or former civilian doctor. The decision of the commission is final. A change of category can occur only at the next meeting of the commission or after a period of inability to work. In accidents, the prisoner is not put on the sicklist, unless his section chief issues him a certificate that he was injured in an on-the-job accident, not his own fault. Since each accident lowers the safety premium of the section leader, a certificate is issued only

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where life is endangered or bones are broken. Treatment varies according to the ability of medical personnel & equipment. In the 4 pits of the north region, (pit 29, pit administration 2, pit 7, & the TES), with 15,000 prisoners, there was only 1 X-ray machine - in pit 7. Accident prevention laws are strict & prescribe drastic punishment, but were obeyed only when a commission from Moscow was effected. Altho dynamite is forbidden in mines with certain gas content, dynamite was used anyway with full

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knowledge of authorities. Remarkable that
no catastrophe occurred — in 1954 an
coal dust
explosion finally occurred — killing 25
prisoners. Pit Administration II, with
1500 men underground, had 7 ^{fatal} accidents
~~in 1954~~ + 90 accidents involving
hospitalizations in 1954.

Leave is a word unknown to prisoner
miners until 1953. The improvement
after the big strike of July - Aug 53
gave underground workers up to a
month's leave in special barracks,
without pay, on special rations, if
they had a yearly average of over 100%.

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fulfilment of ~~norms~~. Indigent prisoners receiving visits from parents, wives, or children could get 10-day unpaid leave to spend in special barracks with their relatives.

In late 54 Vorbata had about 45 camps, totalling 100,000 prisoners. Maximum number reached 125,000 in summer 1952.

Camps were either regime (R) or Vorbata (V). Regime camps (about 35) were directly under MGB, while Vorbata camps were under Komi ASSR MVD.

All camps in the Vorbata area were under Guards Maj. Gen. Derenbo, who

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was also commander of MVD security

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troops. Prisoners in the Volbata camps were mostly criminals or political prisoners with short sentences. They always had wages, reduction of sentence for non-fulfilment, unlimited correspondence rights, passes to leave the camps, & open barracks at night - practically a free life. Regime prisoners however, mostly Soviet citizens convicted with the German army, were sentenced to 10-15 years katorga. Another group were those from the western USSR who actually fought or ^{agitated} against the ~~forces~~. ~~agitated~~

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Third & smallest was the foreign group - about 3000 people. The latter 2 groups were sentenced to 25 years as "isolated" prisoners (yablyudimnyy). In contrast with Vorkuta camps, strict discipline prevailed in regime camps - from 2200 to 0500 barracks were closed, prisoners could write letters twice a year, & there was no ~~work~~ wage, reduction of sentence for normal fulfillment, visits from relatives, or passes out of camp.

Beginning in 1952, conditions in the Vorkuta ~~camps~~ ^{area} became ~~less~~ ^{more} strict.

After the July-August 3 strikes there

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conditions in Regime camps resembled those of Vorluta camps. Various amnesties freed the prisoners, limited release to live freely in the area, living outside the camp area ~~and~~ (daily reporting), shows that the area gradually was changing into an exile area. Prisoners forced to spend another 10 years in the foggy zone far from their families still weren't satisfied. They wanted to go home or to the Baltic ^{countries} & Western Ukraine. The Vorluta Coal Combine worried about its best workers & the plan,

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so they tried to solve the problem by recruiting strenuously in Moscow, Leningrad, Gorkiy, & Kiev, with the result that thousands came up to Vorshita, were promised heaven on earth, spent a few weeks in the murderous climate, & disappeared with the wind.

Prisons & camps in European USSR were then ~~emptied~~ ^{emptied} & the prisoners were sent to Vorshita, refused to go underground, were driven below at gunpoint, & went on sitdown strikes. Release of foreigners did the greatest damage to the Kombinat's plan,

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as they had been the machinists & other key people, almost impossible to replace. Transformation of Vorobita into an elite area brought financial problems as well, as mining by free workers made coal considerably more expensive. The Politburo will solve this problem by presenting the Supreme Soviet of the Komi ASSR the proposal of paying miners a polar differential only after 5 years residence in the area. So the free workers, the only satisfied group in the area are starting to grumble.

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All camps in the Vorkuta area
are ~~divided~~ ^{separate} into 3 zones, ~~separate~~

~~for the first zone~~ The first zone, the
regime zone, is no different from
the punishment camps - same con-
ditions persist as during the Beria
era. The second zone, the "limited
zone" (restricted) is inside the camp
area, & like the regime zone, surround-
ed by a 2-meter high barbed-
wire fence with watchtowers.

Prisoners in ~~the~~ the limited zone
can get passes to leave the area,
& move freely 4-8 hours in a specified

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area. They can visit restaurants & make purchases stores in the free settlements, which are close to the mine camps.

The rule against visiting "free" homes usually isn't carried out, & the MVD usually winks at violations of the rule. Some prisoners of the outer, limited area, receive permission to visit Vorkuta, capital of the area, with its 70,000 inhabitants.

In the third zone, "free" zone, are prisoners whose sentences have been reduced $\frac{2}{3}$. This zone lies outside the real camp area, but has

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the same sort of barracks.

These prisoners live just like the
koles in the area, & may not leave
the area. This free zone (restricted
zone) extends from about 40 km
north of the city of Vorobuta to the
station at Shum ~~(35)~~ 35 km
south of Vorobuta. They may not
select their jobs, but are placed by
the plan section of the camp
administration. They receive 90 % of
~~the~~ wages paid free workers, but
without the paler differential.

With permission of the camp ad-

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ministration, they may have their families join them. These improved conditions are a result of the strikes of July - Aug 53, which followed news of Benjas removal from office.

In the north rayon, mines 7, 12, 14, 29, 16, the TES construction camp, + cement factory struck en masse.

In this rayon alone, the strikers numbered 15,000. The high point of ~~the~~ strike was 25 July - 1 August. For the first time the government had to hear the ~~the~~ demands of the

prisoners - MVD minister Army Gen.

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Maslennikov was the govt representative.
The attempt to put down the strike
with weapons was not fully successful.
In camps 12-14-16, 3 deaths, in camp
29 - 60 deaths. In spite of feverish
work by the MVD/KGB, it was not
possible to ferret out the strike
leaders in the various camps.

Unfortunately, front men fell victim
to the informant system ^{a few} & were
~~not~~ sentenced to long terms in
penitentiaries. Promises made them
by the govt were only ~~hesitantly~~
fulfilled. The 3-zone system

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for Soviet prisoners ones a lot
to the German prisoners who started
laying down their tools individually
in Nov. Dec 54, & could not be
forced by any means to resume
work. As this movement attracted
sympathy & followers among other
nationalities, the ameliorations of
the 3-zone system were instituted,
to prevent rebirth of the strikes
of 1953. After Beria's fall,
prisoners noted an obvious feeling
of uncertainty on the MVD. A higher
official didn't know if the directions

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he gave ~~that~~ one day

would be countermanded the next
by his superiors. In 1952, shirkers
could still be punished with up to
3 months isolation (camp prison on
reduced rations), ~~for~~ chronic cases
with the strait jacket; a limit
of 7 days isolation was set in the
new regulations of 1 Sept 1953.

In habitual offender cases, a
camp chief referred the case to
superior authorities, who held
court on the case & sentenced
the habitual offender to punishment.

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Prisoners no longer fear punishment
camps or solitary, as conditions in
those have improved. No longer
is there a punishment ration in
solitary - 300 g bread & 1000 g soup,
instead, the same food as for
non-workers which = that of
workers - 100 g bread & 10 g fats,
& the person in solitary must be
furnished mattress & blanket.
Camp leaders fear that prisoners
will report to superior authorities
on the general corruption of MVD
camp officials so they usually

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prisoners only with 7 days solitary. In camps 12-14-16, the 18 Germans there did no work after January, & no report was made to the MVD or Vorbata camp administration. The camp chief prescribed solitary up to 8 times for one person, a situation resolved by repatriation of the German.

An innovation introduced in Dec. 14 was the "Comrade counts," composed of prisoners working for the MVD, with a few of the best workers added to give it a

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touch of legitimacy. Members were recommended by the political officer & were elected in "public & free" camp meetings. The comrade courts advised the camp administration on punishment of prisoners & judged the prisoners committing crimes in the limited & free zones.

In Dec. 53, Novyy Sever had an article on Vorobita by the CCCPSU depicting the "heroic role" of Kom-somal brigades in exploitation of mines & construction of the city of Vorobita. No Kom-somulets has

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lifted a shovel in the Vorbata area, tho many have served in the watch towers. The city of Vorbata was built on the bones of thousands of political prisoners.

In summer 1954 troupes came from Leningrad to put on plays in Vorbata. The troupe asserted that conditions were better in Vorbata than Leningrad. They bought a lot of materials & textiles which they could not get in such ~~good~~ quality or ~~as much~~ variety in Leningrad. A sign that things were better

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for prisoners than their relatives,
was that prisoners sent money +
packages to their relatives.

Prisoners have lost the faculty for
independent thought. Exceptions were
the intelligentsia + certain national
groups, ~~especially~~ Latvians + Lithuanians.

A corollary is the inability to
take independent action. E.g. -
the law states that every 7th day
is a holiday if the norm is filled,
but the mine heads always tried to
use the 7th day for overfulfillment.

3 Germans struck once when this

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happened, against protests of the other monks, & were arrested, but later were treated as heroes. When the mine chiefs repeated this lousy trick, half the mine force struck, & on the ~~next~~ recurrence of the attempt, the entire mine force struck.

All Radio stations were heard, tho it was never discussed openly.

Letter communications to West Germany went on through free prisoners, & did not go through the censor.

Airmail took 8 days going & 10

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days back.

On the big strike in 1953, the
prisoners talked a lot about MVD
participation in the strike. In fact
MVD officers accompanied wood
shipments from the Kirov area, &
asked on their arrival what in
the world was wrong that Vorobita
was not on strike. Another sign
was the fact that MVD people worked
themselves into strike committees.

A Col. Klesnikov, aviator & HSO,
imprisoned in 1952, was a contra-
versial figure & Lt. Col. Gurnick,

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former MVD officer [redacted] disappeared after
the strike. He was supposed to
have been sentenced to 10 years in
Ausk, but no one believed that.

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